

- Sleeter, C. E., & McLaren, P. L. (Eds.). (1995). *Multicultural education: Critical pedagogy, and the politics of difference*. Albany: State University of New York Press.
- Susser, B. (1998). EFL's othering of Japan: Orientalism in English language teaching. *JALT Journal*, 20(1), 49–82.
- Thomas, W. P., & Collier, V. P. (1997). *School effectiveness for language minority students*. Washington, DC: National Clearinghouse for Bilingual Education.
- van Dijk, T. A. (1993). *Elite discourse and racism*. Newbury Park, CA: Sage.
- Warren, J. T. (1999). Whiteness and cultural theory: Perspectives on research and education. *Urban Review*, 31(2), 185–203.
- Weedon, C. (1987). *Feminist practice and poststructuralist theory*. Oxford: Basil Blackwell.
- Weedon, C. (1999). *Feminism, theory and the politics of difference*. Oxford: Blackwell.
- Wildman, W. M., & Davis, A. D. (1997). Making systems of privilege visible. In R. Delgado & J. Stefancic (Eds.), *Critical white studies: Looking behind the mirror* (pp. 314–9). Philadelphia: Temple University Press.

## 4 Gender and sexuality in foreign and second language education: Critical and feminist approaches

Aneta Pavlenko

### Introduction

Over the years, a number of scholars have engaged in the study of how gender mediates second (L2) and foreign language (FL) learning in and out of the classroom. Several recent books and state-of-the-art reviews (Chavez, 2000; Ehrlich, 1997; Pavlenko, 2001a; Pavlenko et al., 2001; Sunderland, 2000a) provide a detailed discussion of these studies and do not need to be repeated here. Instead, in the present chapter, I will use a feminist poststructuralist framework to synthesize the findings of the recent studies and to discuss their implications for critical and feminist pedagogies in FL/L2 education.

### Feminist poststructuralism and critical inquiry in FL/L2 education

While there are several approaches to feminist poststructuralism and critical inquiry, I see them sharing a common aim. Thus, I define *feminist poststructuralism*, outlined by Cameron (1992, 1997), Luke and Gore (1992a), and Weedon (1987), and *critical inquiry in applied linguistics*, outlined by Pennycook (2001), as approaches to language study that strive (a) to understand the relationship between power and knowledge; (b) to theorize the role of language in production and reproduction of power, difference, and symbolic domination; and (c) to deconstruct master narratives that oppress certain groups – be it immigrants, women, or minority members – and devalue their linguistic practices.

Similarly, recognizing differences between various pedagogical approaches, in the present chapter, I group together FL/L2 critical and feminist pedagogies that acknowledge and incorporate gender and draw on feminist poststructuralist thought in education (Davies, 1994; Jones, 1993; Luke & Gore, 1992a; Stanton & Stewart, 1995). These approaches are a relatively recent development that owes both to the pioneering efforts of Kramsch and von Hoene (1995, 2001), Nelson (1999),

Norton (2000), Norton Peirce (1995), Pennycook (1999a, 1999b, 2000, 2001), Schenke (1996), Sunderland (1994, 2000a, 2000b), and Vandrick (1994, 1995, 1997, 1999a, 1999b) and to the groundbreaking work of North American and Japanese feminists working in Japan (Casanave & Yamashiro, 1996; Fujimura-Fanselow & Vaughn, 1991; MacGregor, 1998; McMahon, 1997, 2001; Smith & Yamashiro, 1998; Yamashiro, 2000). The critical and feminist FL/L2 pedagogies developed by these and other scholars and teachers aim to demystify normative discourses of gender by clarifying the mechanisms of symbolic domination and to engage students with cross-cultural differences in the meanings of gender and sexuality.

*Language* is seen in this paradigm as the locus of social organization and power and a form of symbolic capital (Bourdieu, 1982/1991) as well as a site of struggle where subjectivity and individual consciousness are produced (Weedon, 1987). In turn, *gender* is seen as "a system of culturally constructed relations of power, produced and reproduced in interaction between and among men and women" (Gal, 1991, p. 176). This poststructuralist view of gender foregrounds sociohistoric, cross-cultural, and cross-linguistic differences in gender construction, emphasizing the fact that normative masculinities and femininities, as well as beliefs and ideas about gender relations, vary across cultures as well as over time within a culture (for an in-depth discussion of diverse meanings of gender across cultures, see Bonvillain, 1995; Ortner, 1996).

This view of gender is distinct from those espoused in other feminist frameworks such as cultural feminism, which inspires research on gender differences in language learning and use, and material feminism, embraced in research on male dominance in interaction (for an informative discussion of how different feminist theories approach language, see Gibbon, 1999). Both of these feminist frameworks often approach men and women as undifferentiated and unitary groups and, as a result, treat gender as an essentialized variable that influences language learning processes and outcomes (cf. Chavez, 2000). This view obscures oppression in terms of class and race and, consequently, the fact that it is *immigrant* women who do not always have access to educational resources, *working class* boys and girls who are silenced in the classroom, or young *black* men who do not have powerful role models in the school hierarchy (Jones, 1993).

In contrast, poststructuralist scholarship engages with full individuals who are positioned not only in terms of gender, but also in terms of age, race, class, ethnicity, national origins, immigrant status, sexuality, or (dis)ability. It also shifts the focus away from essentialist assumptions of "disadvantage" or "superiority" toward an exploration of multiple ways in which gender impacts the process of learning another language. I suggest that a feminist poststructuralist approach forces us to recognize

a dual role gender plays in foreign and second language teaching. On the one hand, learners come into classrooms as individuals whose motivations, investments, choices, and options may be influenced by gender as a system of social relations and discursive practices. On the other hand, language classrooms introduce students to "imaginary worlds" of other languages where gender and sexuality may be constructed and performed differently than in their own culture.

The intersection of multiple individual trajectories and linguistic worlds offers a unique space for engagement with cross-linguistic differences in discursive and social construction of gender and sexuality, for exploration of oppression through dominant discourses of gender, and for production of discourses (and, thus, subjectivities) of resistance. The transformation commonly takes place through led discussions that provide students with multiple opportunities to locate their own personal experiences within larger social contexts and thus involve storytelling and autobiography as discourses of oppositional consciousness. In the words of Kramsch and von Hoene (2001), a feminist pedagogy puts the subject in the center: "It appeals not only to the learner's mind and behaviors, but to a subject's emotions, body, and his or her social and political habitus" (p. 297). In doing so, critical and feminist pedagogies do not neglect language. However, rather than organizing instruction around a fully predetermined curriculum, they advocate for instruction organized around daily experiences and needs of the students, acknowledging the students' complex and gendered realities and multilingual lives (Goldstein, 2001; Pennycook, 2001).

Pennycook (2001) emphasizes that while recent critical approaches to language education are fundamentally political, they distance themselves from the modernist liberalism and emancipatory assuredness of traditional leftist pedagogies that aimed to enlighten the unenlightened and to empower the disempowered. Instead, they explicitly question the key assumptions, goals, and pedagogical practices, such as empowerment, fundamental to earlier literature on critical pedagogy and embodied in the work of Paulo Freire and Ira Shor. Challenging the simplistic dichotomies between empowerment and oppression, or us (teachers) and them (students), feminist poststructuralist theorists call into question the privilege given to talk versus silence and to the public use of language versus private reflection (Kramsch & von Hoene, 2001). They also ask whether attempts to empower students to find and articulate their voices constitute, in themselves, a controlling process, one that demands verbal collaboration (Orner, 1992). Foregrounding difference, critical feminist approaches emphasize the impossibility of claiming "single-strategy pedagogies of empowerment, emancipation, and liberation" (Luke & Gore, 1992b, p. 7). Rather, they force us to challenge our own assumptions, to problematize our everyday practices, and to engage students in examining

their own – and our – linguistic options, choices, and behaviors, developing, in the process, critical agency and “multivoiced consciousness” (Kramsch & von Hoene, 2001).

## Gender in second and foreign language learning and teaching

My discussion of recent developments in feminist and critical research and praxis in FL/L2 education will touch upon three key areas where gender is central in language learning and teaching: (a) gendered inequalities in access to material and symbolic resources, (b) gendered nature of linguistic interaction, and (c) sexual harassment as a discursive and social practice. Then, I will discuss larger implications of this research for creation of critical feminist curricula. While not all of the studies I discuss below were conducted in the feminist poststructuralist paradigm, my analysis will be, at all times, explicitly situated in this framework.

### *Gendered inequalities in access to material and symbolic resources*

The first issue addressed by critical and feminist pedagogies is systemic inequality: namely, the fact that gender, in conjunction with ethnicity, race, class, age, sexuality, or (dis)ability, may mediate individuals' access to material and symbolic resources, including educational and interactional opportunities. The key finding in the field of multilingualism, second language learning, and gender is that in contexts where a second or a majority language constitutes a valuable form of symbolic capital associated with social and economic benefits, some women – in particular, older immigrant and minority women from lower socioeconomic backgrounds – may face a number of gatekeeping practices that restrict their mobility and access to linguistic resources and learning opportunities (Corson, 2001; Goldstein, 1995, 2001; Heller, 1999, 2001; Kouritzin, 2000; Norton, 2000; Pavlenko & Piller, 2001).

Feminist and critical pedagogies address these inequalities in three ways: first, by creating language classes and programs responding to the needs of particular learners such as working class immigrant women; second, by acknowledging and exploring gender inequalities and discourses of resistance in classroom readings and discussions; and third, by examining access difficulties that prevent particular learners from taking advantage of educational opportunities. A case study by Rivera (1999) offers an excellent example of a program that helps working class immigrant Latina women acquire literacy skills, improve basic education, increase English proficiency, and prepare for the high school equivalency exam.

The curriculum and pedagogy implemented in the program build on the strength, survival skills, and linguistic and cultural resources of these women and question and challenge the social and economic forces that shape their lives. Several aspects of the curriculum make it particularly effective in bringing about change and helping participants to become partners in the educational process. To begin with, in order to acknowledge and incorporate the women's voices, the classes are conducted in both English and Spanish; this enables the students to participate more actively in the classroom and to share their personal experiences. The program helps the women realize that they had not learned to read as children because they were women who shared a certain cultural, social, and economic background and, in doing so, allows them to make links between their personal experiences and larger socioeconomic contexts. Students are also encouraged to conduct research in their own community on the topics they consider important (e.g., Latino immigration or the right to vote), to take action on issues, and to take up leadership positions in the community. The program also consciously blurs the line between teachers and students by continuously training some of the program's graduates to come back to the program as teachers.

Several studies also remind us that access problems may arise even in contexts where language classes, professional training, and other educational and linguistic resources are formally available to immigrants. Young immigrant women may be prohibited from attending classes where there are male students, as was the case with some Portuguese women in Goldstein's (1995, 2001) study. Mothers may be forced to stay home if the community culture mandates that only family should look after children, as was the case with a woman from India in Kouritzin's (2000) study. Other women may need to support their families and immediately go to work in the workplace that does not require high levels of majority language competence (Goldstein, 1995, 2001; Holmes, 1993; Norton Peirce, Harper, & Burnaby, 1993). Once working, women may be concerned that taking English classes may hamper their productivity and thus interfere with their employment (Norton Peirce et al., 1993). They may also be reluctant to attend classes due to lack of prior education (Tran, 1988) or because their husbands do not want the wives to become more educated than they are (Norton Peirce et al., 1993). Consequently, even the best of solutions, such as evening and weekend classes and externally funded daycare, may not help women who are culturally required to prioritize their roles as housekeepers, mothers, daughters, wives, or caretakers and economically forced to prioritize their employment. This situation is particularly troublesome in the case of refugees living outside of well-established immigrant communities in contexts where access to employment, health services, and education is predicated on the knowledge of the majority language.

The cases above remind us that in order to practice the pedagogy of inclusion and engagement, we need to think not only about the learners who are already in the classrooms but also about those who are excluded from access to symbolic resources. Gender as a system of social relations, in conjunction with race, ethnicity, class, and age, continues to play an important role in this exclusion as older immigrant women from lower socioeconomic backgrounds are often found among the most disempowered members of Western societies.

### *Gendered nature of linguistic interaction*

Another important area of recent research addresses the gendered nature of linguistic exchanges suggesting that even when students make it to the classroom, interaction patterns may favor some over others. Two main approaches to the study of classroom interaction can be distinguished in the field of education (see also Sunderland's chapter, this volume). The first focuses on differences in the amount and quality of talk between boys and girls or men and women (cf. Sadker & Sadker, 1985), while the second asks whose discursive practices dominate the classroom and which particular men and women have the right to speak and to define meaning and which remain invisible (cf. Lewis & Simon, 1986).

The studies in FL/L2 education conducted within the first approach, typically inspired by material feminism, suggest that in some contexts, boys and men may dominate classroom talk and mixed-sex interactions through interruptions and unsolicited responses while girls and women profit more from same-sex group discussions (cf. Chavez, 2000; Shehadeh, 1999). These studies are deeply problematic for at least two reasons. First of all, they operate within essentialized gender dichotomies that do not consider either diversity in the classrooms or values assigned to different discursive practices in different contexts. Second, they make a problematic assumption that a high amount of interaction is, in itself, a positive phenomenon that leads to higher achievement. In reality, it is quite possible that some students may speak up quite frequently but progress very little, if at all, while others who contribute little to classroom discussions, for individual or cultural reasons, may succeed in accomplishing their own language learning goals. Most important, as pointed out by Lewis and Simon (1986) and Luke (1992), we should look beyond "donation" of equal classroom time as this focus "skirts the structural problematic of who, in schools or universities, has the authority to speak, to critique, and to judge what is worthwhile (student) speech and critique" (Luke, 1992, p. 39).

These concerns are heeded in the second approach, which examines classroom talk within a larger critical framework. An excellent example of how this can be accomplished is a classroom ethnography by Willett

(1995) that illuminates the fact that class and gender mediate learning opportunities even for the youngest L2 learners. In her examination of second language socialization of four seven-year-old English as a second language (ESL) children in a mainstream classroom, the researcher found that three middle class girls were treated differently from one working class boy. While the girls were allowed to work together, the boy was seated far away from his bilingual male friends and, as a result, had to rely on adults for help. Thus, even though the boy participated in numerous interactions, he earned a status of a needy child unable to work independently. As a result, when all four children scored the same on the Bilingual Syntax Measure, the three girls were allowed to exit the ESL class while the boy was told to stay. This and similar studies suggest that classroom interaction practices are assigned values in the context of local ideologies of language, class, and gender. Consequently, learners whose participation patterns are aligned with the dominant culture of learning may be evaluated higher than those who espouse alternative beliefs about appropriate classroom behaviors. In turn, students whose voices are not being acknowledged in the classroom may lose their desire to learn the language or may even engage in passive resistance to classroom practices and curriculum demands. Among these disenfranchised learners are both immigrant girls (Corson, 1998, 2001; Heller, 2001) and working class boys (Heller, 2001; Willett, 1995).

It is not surprising then that development of voice and authoritative means of self-expression, often termed "the right to speak" and the ability "to impose reception" (Bourdieu, 1982/1991), have become a central concern in feminist and critical approaches to FL/L2 pedagogy. Mere encouragement is no longer seen as sufficient – teachers need to provide the learners both with the safe space and with adequate linguistic resources for development of voices which can be heard. This development of a critical voice is often accomplished in feminist classrooms through the uses of personal narratives as a form of self-disclosure, knowledge, and authority.

Pioneering work on critical consciousness raising and voice development in foreign language education has been carried out by North American and Japanese feminists teaching English in Japan – most notably, McMahon (1997, 2001). McMahon's (2001) study of a feminist FL class suggests that the links perceived between feminism and English lead female Japanese learners to see English as a language of empowerment. The students state that the new vocabulary, the new themes, and the pronoun system of English allow them to position and express themselves differently as more independent individuals than when speaking Japanese. In turn, Frye (1999) examines implementation of feminist critical pedagogy in an L2 literacy class for immigrant low-income Latina women in the United States. Similar to the classroom described by McMahon (2001),

the favorite forms of participation in this class were discussions and storytelling, where the women could share experiences, give each other advice, and explore differences in age, race, social class, religious background, sexual orientation, national origin, educational background, and the use of Spanish. It is these explorations that engendered most meaningful – albeit heated and, at times, even angry – conversations, discussions, and activities, through which the participants learned to negotiate differences and to practice their new voices. The comparison of their own stories to those of others allowed the women to see commonalities and disparities, to question the oppressive social and cultural forces that shaped their lives, and to perform new critical selves, constructing new possibilities and new visions for the future.

Of particular interest here are cases where resistance to the target language is prompted by the voice one acquires in it. For instance, Western women, at times, reject certain aspects of the Japanese female register, including gender-specific discourse markers (Siegal, 1996) or pitch, perceived by some as too “girlish” or “silly” (Ohara, 2001). Some choose to use more neutral discourse markers or maintain their English pitch – at the expense of sounding “less Japanese.” Similarly, an American philosopher, Richard Watson (1995), justifying his reluctance to learn spoken French, comments tongue-in-cheek: “For American men at least, French sounds syrupy and effeminate” (p. 52).

Together, the studies above suggest that cross-linguistic and cross-cultural differences in gender as a system of discursive practices could be productively explored in the classroom. Learners could be encouraged to examine their language choices, perceptions, attitudes, and alternative selves offered to them by the new language, as well as decisions to adopt a voice that is less “native-like” but more acceptable in terms of their own gendered selves.

### *Sexual harassment as a discursive and social practice*

To help learners develop new and powerful voices, teachers also need to acknowledge the gendered nature of linguistic interactions outside of the classroom. While textbooks typically offer learners texts and dialogues that are presumed to have stable meanings, in reality, utterances are interpreted in light of how the interlocutors are positioned with regard to each other in terms of gender, age, social status, or familiarity. The knowledge of discourses of gender and sexuality dominant in a particular culture could become crucial in deciding whether a particular utterance is a polite compliment, a light-hearted joke, or an attempt at sexual harassment. The lack of such knowledge may lead to miscommunication and negative attitudes toward the target language. It is not surprising then that recent research examines sexual harassment as a social and discursive practice

that may restrict women's movement in the target language community, decrease the amount of interaction with target language speakers, and promote resentment and resistance to the target language (Ehrlich, 2001).

Complaints about behaviors perceived as sexual harassment have been documented in a wide range of contexts where American students travel to study – among them, Costa Rica, France, Japan, Russia, and Spain (Ehrlich, 2001; Polanyi, 1995; Siegal, 1996; Talburt & Stewart, 1999; Twombly, 1995). A particularly clear case for the link between differential language outcomes and sexual harassment is made in a study by Polanyi, which compares test scores on the Russian Oral Proficiency test by male and female American students prior to, and upon return from, study abroad in Russia. Before the trip, males and females achieved similar scores; however, upon return, male students showed greater gains and outperformed female students, in particular, on the listening test. The author links this differential achievement to sexual harassment experienced by American females, which, in turn, led to these women's growing reluctance to interact with Russians. Gender and race also appear to have limited the interactional opportunities of Misheila, an African American student on a study abroad trip to Spain (Talburt & Stewart, 1999). During the trip, Misheila had found herself consistently singled out by Spanish males: “When I walk in the streets I always receive comments on my skin and sexual commentaries, especially with old men and adolescents . . .” (p. 169). This sexual harassment, whether real or perceived, provoked a negative reaction in her toward Spanish and its speakers and may have curtailed any future investment in learning Spanish.

Consequently, Ehrlich (2001), Goldstein (1995), Polanyi (1995), and Vandrick (1995) call for more attention to the discursive practice of sexual harassment in the second and foreign language classroom. Ehrlich underscores that, as dispreferred responses, sexual refusals require much more linguistic and sociolinguistic interactional competence than sexual acceptances. Included among linguistic features that characterize competent refusals are delays (pauses and hesitations), hedges (e.g., *well*, *uh*), palliatives (e.g., apologies), and accounts (e.g., explanations, justifications). Ehrlich and Polanyi argue that refusals and other gendered speech acts should find a legitimate place in foreign language classrooms. In turn, Goldstein shows how issues of sexual harassment and assault can be incorporated in ESL classes and suggests ESL texts that provide women learning English with the language they need to respond to sexual harassment. Vandrick lists other useful resources that can be successfully incorporated in feminist ESL classrooms.

Notably, however, even when certain behaviors are commonly seen as unacceptable in the United States, this consensus cannot be easily extrapolated to other cultures. For instance, when inadvertent touching takes place, in particular between a male and a female, in many U.S.

A . . . . . BETWEEN A MALE AND A FEMALE, IN MANY U.S.

communities, an apology is expected, while in Israel, China, or Japan, no apology is necessary. Sex-related joking, sexual banter, and catcalls are a legitimate means of performing masculinity in Eastern Europe, Spain, or Costa Rica (Pavlenko, 2001b; Pujolar, 2000; Twombly, 1995) but may be legally deemed sexual harassment in the United States. In contrast, while in many places in the United States it is considered to be a normal and friendly behavior for strangers of both genders to smile at each other, in other cultures, such behavior may be viewed as sexual and lead to miscommunication. Carroll (1988) points out that in France, nonverbal behaviors considered nonsexual in the United States may be seen as an invitation for a "pick-up" and constitute "a continual source of problems for unsuspecting American women" (p. 27). Similarly, Twombly (1995) and Talburt and Stewart (1999) argue that in order to avoid intercultural miscommunication, programs that send students to Spanish-speaking countries need to incorporate discussions of potential affective dimensions of the commonly used terms such as *negrita* [darkie] or *gordita* [fatso] and the multiple meanings of such common verbal behavior as *piropoing* [catcalling].

Interesting evidence of cultural and individual differences in definitions of what is seen as inappropriate behavior and sexual harassment comes from a study by Tyler and Boxer (1996) conducted within the context of International Teaching Assistant (ITA) training in a U.S. university. The researchers created twelve scenarios based on naturally occurring – and potentially problematic – interactions between ITAs and undergraduate students and asked forty-four U.S. undergraduates of both genders and twenty male ITAs for written interpretations, followed by in-depth interviews. Quantitative analyses of the results demonstrated that for five of the twelve scenarios, the responses of female undergraduates differed from those of male ITAs. A combination of quantitative and qualitative analyses identified both gender and cultural differences in student responses. In particular, several male ITAs found certain behaviors, such as putting an arm around one's shoulder, nonsexual and fully appropriate, while female and – to a lesser degree – male undergraduates found them unacceptable and sexually implicit. Tyler and Boxer point out that while younger Americans exhibit heightened sensitivity to the issue of sexual harassment, in other societies, the same verbal and nonverbal behaviors may be perceived as nonsexual in nature or, even when perceived as sexual, treated lightly. This disparity creates a range of problems for ITAs at U.S. universities that, at times, culminate in sexual harassment charges made against male ITAs by U.S. female undergraduates. This study in which ITAs were invited to discuss a number of potentially problematic and ambiguous scripts offers a promising direction for foreign and second language classrooms and for ITA and teacher training in cross-cultural contexts.

To sum up, recent research indicates that the social and discursive practice of sexual harassment may become particularly salient at the intersection of languages and cultures where second language users cannot competently participate in the gendered discursive practices of the other culture. To counteract both intercultural miscommunication and marginalization of particular learners, classroom discussions of competing conceptions of sexual harassment and other inappropriate forms of verbal behavior need, on the one hand, to acknowledge cross-cultural differences in discourses of gender and sexuality and, on the other, provide the learners with appropriate linguistic means of verbal self-defense.

### Inclusivity, engagement, and authenticity in a critical feminist curriculum

This brief discussion of three strands of research on the role of gender in FL/L2 learning and teaching points to three key features of a critical feminist approach to language education: inclusivity, engagement, and authenticity (Nelson, 1999; Pennycook, 1999b).

*Inclusivity* here refers to acknowledgment of the fact that both students and target language speakers may have diverse ethnic, racial, and class backgrounds, sexual identities, and different degrees of (dis)ability. Goldstein (1995) and Vandrick (1995) underscore the need for inclusivity in terms of topics and argue that in adult ESL classes, discussions should embrace such important issues as sexual harassment, violence against women, pregnancy on the job, maternity leave, and the role of business and media in reproducing normative femininities and masculinities.

At the same time, many educators emphasize that inclusivity, per se, is not the ultimate goal in feminist praxis as it rarely goes beyond acknowledgment and the static sense of possibility (Nelson, 1999; Pennycook, 1999b). Sunderland (2000b) argues that even inherently biased texts could be put to good use by experienced teachers. Consequently, what is important in critical feminist pedagogies is the types of issues raised and the types of *engagement* offered in the classroom. The multiple forms of engagement should aim to offer a safe space in which students could learn to recognize and acknowledge existing gender discourses and explore alternative discourses, identities, and futures. Schenke (1996) argues that our understanding of *safe* should go beyond the trivial treatment of gender and encompass discussions that venture into the perilous domain of differences, even though "to unsettle familiar stories is, after all, to take risks with ourselves, our histories, and our feminist theories" (p. 157).

The key way to explore alternative discourses and possibilities is through *authenticity*, which involves recognition of cultural differences, of otherness, and of multiple interpretations and perceptions of gendered



performances. This exploration, according to Kramsch and von Hoene (2001), has to move beyond standardized and generic authenticity of the language classroom to recapture the uniqueness of speech events and to make difference, rather than diversity, the key experience in language learning. Kramsch and von Hoene (1995, 2001) contend that FL instruction in the United States promotes a biased and ethnocentric knowledge, or "single-voiced consciousness," and does not allow the students to view themselves from the perspective of other cultures and thus acquire intercultural competence, or "multivoiced consciousness."

A case where such an opportunity was missed is illustrated in Durham's (1995) examination of the controversy over the alleged sexism of a French textbook and accompanying video, "French in Action." The students in a U.S. university classroom where these materials were used filed a complaint stating that both the text and the video were explicitly sexist and offensive. Durham's analysis shows that in their interpretation of texts and images, both professors and students imposed their own culturally informed beliefs and stereotypes on what could be alternatively perceived as an ironic postmodernist feminist critique of Hollywood's sexual romance narrative and of conventional discourses of masculinity. The researcher places this instance of intercultural misunderstanding within the larger context of differences between American and French feminist thought, arguing that the students' interpretations are fully consistent with the principles of American academic feminism but show complete lack of knowledge and understanding of French discourses of feminism, sexuality, and gender. This ideological position leads the students to equate sexism with the portrayal of sexuality and perhaps even with all instances of depiction of the female body. It also leads them to read female silence as negative and powerless (whereas it can also be seen as a culturally approved strategy in dealing with pick-up attempts) and male speech as positive and powerful (even when the male protagonist is actually portrayed as ineffectual and ridiculous). As a result, argues Durham, the students engage in an ethnocentric reading of the text and – since their teachers did not attempt to counteract such a reading – lose an opportunity to access important dimensions of French culture. Here, it is important to emphasize that recognition of multiple interpretations of certain verbal and nonverbal behaviors does not preclude us from seeing sexual harassment and violence against women as real issues. Yet it pushes students to consider alternative scenarios in order to avoid both ethnocentric biases and cultural stereotyping. To do so, however, requires them to suspend the familiar system of beliefs, which may be a daunting task in the confines of a foreign language classroom.

In contrast, in the context of English instruction, cross-cultural encounters appear somewhat more successful. Nelson (1999) offers an outstanding example of how to examine ways in which gender and sexual

identities are constructed and legitimized linguistically, socially, and culturally. Her case study depicts an ESL lesson in which a teacher attempts to raise students' consciousness about cultural relativity in interpretations of same-sex affection displays. Going far beyond creating a gay- and lesbian-friendly environment, the teacher engages in an exploration of discourses of sexuality that normalize certain identities and behaviors and problematize others, and, as a result, frames the interpretive process, rather than particular behaviors, as potentially problematic.

Another example of successful introduction of the issues of sexuality in an English for Academic Purposes (EAP) class is offered by Benesch (1999). In this study, the teacher's initial attempts to talk about the murder of Matthew Shepard, an openly gay student, are initially met with negative or dismissive reactions from students. A shift in focus from some abstract gay issues to a discussion of their own experiences and reactions helped to initiate a deeper consideration of the roots of homophobic attitudes. The students, similar to those in Nelson's study, pointed to cross-cultural differences with regard to same-sex public affection displays, which are acceptable in many countries, but may be perceived negatively in the context of U.S. homophobia.

There is no doubt that classrooms where students come together from a variety of linguistic, ethnic, and cultural backgrounds to learn an additional language constitute a unique setting for exposing social and cultural underpinnings of identity categories – in particular, gender and sexuality. At the same time, and perhaps due to this multiplicity and richness, this environment is also fraught with problems. Among these problems are the possibility that authentic gender discourses of one culture may make learners from another culture extremely uncomfortable (as seen in Durham's [1995] study) and the fact that Anglo linguistic and communicative norms and cultural values are often imposed as universal (Cameron, 2002). It is this linguistic and cultural imperialism that best accounts for American students' reluctance to positively engage with alternative gender discourses and beliefs and for ESL students' willingness to learn about and, at times, to adopt new speech acts, behaviors, and values.

Vandrick's (1999a) personal reflections on growing up as a "missionary kid" point to ways in which some of the most progressive ESL teachers may still carry vestiges of the colonial past and use the West as the central reference point. In a similar vein, Asher and Smith Crocco (2001) remind us that "the Beijing Conference on Women's Rights in 1995 made clear that many non-Western women believe Western feminists are trapped within their own cultural paradigms and reflect the very forms of cultural imperialism and ethnocentric preconceptions for which the West is notorious" (p. 132). These authors examine the tensions faced by teachers who attempt to acknowledge cross-cultural differences in

gender and sexuality and, in doing so, to search for a middle ground between ethnocentrism, which presents the experience of white, middle class, Western females as normative, and cultural relativism, which recognizes difference but offers no critique of practices such as suttee or genital mutilation.

An excellent argument for the need to look beyond Western conceptions of femininity is made by Abu Odeh (1997), who argues that in the context of Arab feminism, the contemporary veil is an empowering practice that seeks to address sexual harassment on the street. Abu Odeh reminds the reader that in the 1970s, many women walked the streets of Arab cities wearing Western attire, which may have positioned them as "civilized," but also as sexualized and objectified, making them, more than ever, victims of public sexual harassment. In the 1980s, the ambivalence the women felt about this clothing and public humiliation they experienced led them to revert to traditional Islamic dress. The veil shielded them from sexual harassment and empowered them to raise objections when such attempts took place; it did not prevent them from taking advantage of new educational and employment opportunities.

A similar argument comes from Kitetu and Sunderland (2000), who examine differential treatment of men and women in a Kenyan classroom, concluding that Western notions of women's rights, privilege, or disadvantage may not easily apply in that context. The authors argue that at this particular moment in Kenyan socioeconomic development, girls and women benefit less from an equal opportunities discourse and more from a privileged femininity discourse even though it may appear sexist from a Western perspective.

In sum, we can see that the field of FL/L2 education needs not only critical and feminist approaches, but also postcolonial theory that deconstructs Western ethnocentrism and recognizes important intersections between race, ethnicity, class, sexuality, geography, colonial tradition, and culture in the shaping of gender. This theory will allow us to challenge the assumption that all individuals share the same needs and desires as those of white, middle class, Western men and women and that the discourse of human rights can be uncritically applied to non-Western notions of gender without interrogating the Western values at the base of the system.

## Conclusions

Together, studies investigating ways in which gender mediates access and interaction in the context of FL and L2 education suggest that more attention needs to be paid to locally constructed relations of power that are predicated not only on gender, but also on age, ethnicity, sexuality, class,

and linguistic and cultural background. This complex approach should not, however, distract attention from the fact that it is female learners – and in particular, older immigrant women from lower socioeconomic backgrounds – that are still disadvantaged in the majority of contexts.

Critical feminist pedagogies respond to the research findings discussed above by incorporating the following distinguishing features into the FL/L2 curriculum (see also Mackie, 1999): (a) creation of programs suited to the needs of particular populations in order to ensure equal access and equal educational opportunities for all students; (b) acknowledgment of the students' multiple identities and multilingual realities; (c) incorporation of various forms of linguistic and cultural capital brought into the classroom by the students; (d) atmosphere of mutual respect, trust, and community that recognizes similarities and differences among the participants and allows for multiple viewpoints and positions; (e) personalization of instruction through incorporation of the students' own experiences; (f) shared leadership and presence of cooperative structures such as collaborative projects; (g) consciousness-raising with regard to how social contexts impact learning trajectories as well as with regard to researchers' and teachers' own subjective stances and involvements; and, finally, (h) continuous exploration of commonalities and differences in the discourses of gender and sexuality across cultures and communities in order to help students develop a "multivoiced consciousness."

## References

- Abu Odeh, L. (1997). Post-colonial feminism and the veil: Thinking the difference. In M. Gergen & S. Davis (Eds.), *Toward a new psychology of gender: A reader* (pp. 245–56). New York: Routledge.
- Asher, N., & Smith Crocco, M. (2001). (En)gendering multicultural identities and representations in education. *Theory and Research in Social Education*, 29(1), 129–51.
- Benesch, S. (1999). Thinking critically, thinking dialogically. *TESOL Quarterly*, 33(3), 573–80.
- Bonvillain, N. (1995). *Women and men: Cultural constructs of gender*. Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall.
- Bourdieu, P. (1991). *Language and symbolic power* (G. Raymond & M. Adamson, Trans.). Cambridge, England: Polity Press. (Original work published 1982.)
- Cameron, D. (1992). *Feminism and linguistic theory* (2nd ed.). London: McMillan.
- Cameron, D. (1997). Theoretical debates in feminist linguistics: Questions of sex and gender. In R. Wodak (Ed.), *Gender and discourse* (pp. 21–36). London: Sage.
- Cameron, D. (2002). Globalization and the teaching of "communication skills." In D. Block & D. Cameron (Eds.), *Globalization and language teaching* (pp. 67–82). New York: Routledge.



- Carroll, R. (1988). *Cultural misunderstandings: The French-American experience*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
- Casanave, C., & Yamashiro, A. (Eds.). (1996). Gender issues in language education [Special issue]. *Keio University Shonan Fujisawa Campus Journal*.
- Chavez, M. (2000). *Gender in the language classroom*. Boston: McGraw-Hill.
- Corson, D. (1998). *Changing education for diversity*. London: Open University Press.
- Corson, D. (2001). *Language, diversity, and education*. Mahwah, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates.
- Davies, B. (1994). *Poststructuralist theory and classroom practice*. Geelong, Australia: Deakin University Press.
- Durham, C. (1995). At the crossroads of gender and culture: Where feminism and sexism intersect. *Modern Language Journal*, 79(2), 153–65.
- Ehrlich, S. (1997). Gender as social practice: Implications for second language acquisition. *Studies in Second Language Acquisition*, 19, 421–46.
- Ehrlich, S. (2001). Gendering the “learner”: Sexual harassment and second language acquisition. In A. Pavlenko, A. Blackledge, I. Piller, & M. Teutsch-Dwyer (Eds.), *Multilingualism, second language learning, and gender* (pp. 103–29). Berlin: Mouton de Gruyter.
- Frye, D. (1999). Participatory education as a critical framework for immigrant women’s ESL class. *TESOL Quarterly*, 33(3), 501–13.
- Fujimura-Fanselow, K., & Vaughn, D. (Eds.). (1991). Feminist issues in language teaching [Special issue]. *Language Teacher*, 15(7).
- Gal, S. (1991). Between speech and silence: The problematics of research on language and gender. In M. Di Leonardo (Ed.), *Gender at the crossroads of knowledge* (pp. 175–203). Berkeley: University of California Press.
- Gibbon, M. (1999). *Feminist perspectives on language*. New York: Longman.
- Goldstein, T. (1995). “Nobody is talking bad”: Creating community and claiming power on the production lines. In K. Hall & M. Bucholtz (Eds.), *Gender articulated: Language and the socially constructed self* (pp. 375–400). New York: Routledge.
- Goldstein, T. (2001). Researching women’s language practices in multilingual workplaces. In A. Pavlenko, A. Blackledge, I. Piller, & M. Teutsch-Dwyer (Eds.), *Multilingualism, second language learning, and gender* (pp. 77–101). Berlin: Mouton de Gruyter.
- Heller, M. (1999). *Linguistic minorities and modernity: A sociolinguistic ethnography*. New York: Longman.
- Heller, M. (2001). Gender and public space in a bilingual school. In A. Pavlenko, A. Blackledge, I. Piller, & M. Teutsch-Dwyer (Eds.), *Multilingualism, second language learning, and gender* (pp. 257–82). Berlin: Mouton de Gruyter.
- Holmes, J. (1993). Immigrant women and language maintenance in Australia and New Zealand. *International Journal of Applied Linguistics*, 3(2), 159–79.
- Jones, A. (1993). Becoming a “girl”: Post-structuralist suggestions for educational research. *Gender and Education*, 5(2), 157–66.
- Kitetu, C., & Sunderland, J. (2000). Gendered discourses in the classroom: The importance of cultural diversity. *Temple University Japan Working Papers in Applied Linguistics*, 17, 26–40.
- Kouritzin, S. (2000). Immigrant mothers redefine access to ESL classes: Contradiction and ambivalence. *Journal of Multilingual and Multicultural Development*, 21(1), 14–32.
- Kramsch, C., & von Hoene, L. (1995). The dialogic emergence of difference: Feminist explorations in foreign language learning and teaching. In D. Stanton & A. Stewart (Eds.), *Feminisms in the academy* (pp. 330–57). Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press.
- Kramsch, C., & von Hoene, L. (2001). Cross-cultural excursions: Foreign language study and feminist discourses of travel. In A. Pavlenko, A. Blackledge, I. Piller, & M. Teutsch-Dwyer (Eds.), *Multilingualism, second language learning, and gender* (pp. 283–306). Berlin: Mouton de Gruyter.
- Lewis, M., & Simon, R. (1986). A discourse not intended for her: Learning and teaching within patriarchy. *Harvard Educational Review*, 56(4), 457–72.
- Luke, C. (1992). Feminist politics in radical pedagogy. In C. Luke & J. Gore (Eds.), *Feminisms and critical pedagogy* (pp. 25–53). New York: Routledge.
- Luke, C., & Gore, J. (Eds.). (1992a). *Feminisms and critical pedagogy*. New York: Routledge.
- Luke, C., & Gore, J. (1992b). Introduction. In C. Luke & J. Gore (Eds.), *Feminisms and critical pedagogy* (pp. 1–14). New York: Routledge.
- MacGregor, L. (Ed.). (1998). [Special issue]. *Language Teacher*, 22(6).
- Mackie, A. (1999). Possibilities for feminism in ESL education and research. *TESOL Quarterly*, 33(3), 566–73.
- McMahill, C. (1997). Communities of resistance: A case study of two feminist English classes in Japan. *TESOL Quarterly*, 31, 612–22.
- McMahill, C. (2001). Self-expression, gender, and community: A Japanese feminist English class. In A. Pavlenko, A. Blackledge, I. Piller, & M. Teutsch-Dwyer (Eds.), *Multilingualism, second language learning, and gender* (pp. 307–44). Berlin: Mouton de Gruyter.
- Nelson, C. (1999). Sexual identities in ESL: Queer theory and classroom inquiry. *TESOL Quarterly*, 33(3), 371–91.
- Norton, B. (2000). *Identity and language learning: Gender, ethnicity and educational change*. Harlow, England: Pearson Education.
- Norton Peirce, B. (1995). Social identity, investment, and language learning. *TESOL Quarterly*, 29(1), 9–31.
- Norton Peirce, B., Harper, H., & Burnaby, B. (1993). Workplace ESL at Levi Strauss: “Dropouts” speak out. *TESL Canada Journal*, 10(2), 9–30.
- Ohara, Y. (2001). Finding one’s voice in Japanese: A study of pitch levels of L2 users. In A. Pavlenko, A. Blackledge, I. Piller, & M. Teutsch-Dwyer (Eds.), *Multilingualism, second language learning, and gender* (pp. 231–54). Berlin: Mouton de Gruyter.
- Orner, M. (1992). Interrupting the calls for student voice in “liberatory” education: A feminist poststructuralist perspective. In C. Luke & J. Gore (Eds.), *Feminisms and critical pedagogy* (pp. 74–89). New York: Routledge.
- Ortner, S. (1996). *Making gender: The politics and erotics of culture*. Boston: Beacon Press.
- Pavlenko, A. (2001a). Bilingualism, gender, and ideology. *International Journal of Bilingualism*, 5(2), 117–51.
- Pavlenko, A. (2001b). “How am I to become a woman in an American vein?” Transformations of gender performance in second language learning. In A.

- Pavlenko, A., Blackledge, I., Piller, & M. Teutsch-Dwyer (Eds.), *Multilingualism, second language learning, and gender* (pp. 133–74). Berlin: Mouton de Gruyter.
- Pavlenko, A., Blackledge, A., Piller, I., & Teutsch-Dwyer, M. (Eds.). (2001). *Multilingualism, second language learning, and gender*. Berlin: Mouton de Gruyter.
- Pavlenko, A., & Piller, I. (2001). New directions in the study of multilingualism, second language learning and gender. In A. Pavlenko, A. Blackledge, I. Piller, & M. Teutsch-Dwyer (Eds.), *Multilingualism, second language learning, and gender* (pp. 17–52). Berlin: Mouton de Gruyter.
- Pennycook, A. (Ed.). (1999a). Critical approaches to TESOL [Special issue]. *TESOL Quarterly*, 33(3).
- Pennycook, A. (1999b). Introduction: Critical approaches to TESOL. *TESOL Quarterly*, 33(3), 329–48.
- Pennycook, A. (2000). The social politics and the cultural politics of language classrooms. In J. K. Hall & W. Eggington (Eds.), *The sociopolitics of English language teaching* (pp. 89–103). Clevedon, England: Multilingual Matters.
- Pennycook, A. (2001). *Critical applied linguistics: A critical introduction*. Mahwah, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates.
- Polanyi, L. (1995). Language learning and living abroad: Stories from the field. In B. Freed (Ed.), *Second language acquisition in a study abroad context* (pp. 271–91). Philadelphia: John Benjamins.
- Pujolar, J. (2000). *Gender, heteroglossia, and power: A sociolinguistic study of youth culture*. Berlin: Mouton de Gruyter.
- Rivera, K. (1999). Popular research and social transformation: A community-based approach to critical pedagogy. *TESOL Quarterly*, 33(3), 485–500.
- Sadker, M., & Sadker, D. (1985, March). Sexism in the schoolroom of the '80s. *Psychology Today*, 54–7.
- Schenke, A. (1996) Not just a "social issue": Teaching feminist in ESL. *TESOL Quarterly*, 30, 155–9.
- Shehadeh, A. (1999). Gender differences and equal opportunities in the ESL classroom. *ELT Journal*, 53(4), 256–61.
- Siegal, M. (1996). The role of learner subjectivity in second language sociolinguistic competency: Western women learning Japanese. *Applied Linguistics*, 17, 356–82.
- Smith, S., & Yamashiro, A. (1998). (Eds.). Gender issues in language teaching. [Special issue]. *Language Teacher*, 22(5).
- Stanton, D., & Stewart, A. (Eds.). (1995). *Feminisms in the academy*. Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press.
- Sunderland, J. (Ed.). (1994). *Exploring gender: Questions and implications for English language education*. New York: Prentice Hall.
- Sunderland, J. (2000a). Issues of language and gender in second and foreign language education. *Language Teaching*, 33(4), 203–23.
- Sunderland, J. (2000b). New understandings of gender and language classroom research: Texts, teacher talk and student talk. *Language Teaching Research*, 4(2), 149–73.
- Talbut, S., & Stewart, M. (1999). What's the subject of study abroad? Race, gender, and "living culture." *Modern Language Journal*, 83(2), 163–75.

- Tran, T. (1988). Sex differences in English language acculturation and learning strategies among Vietnamese adults aged 40 and over in the United States. *Sex Roles*, 19(11/12), 747–58.
- Twombly, S. (1995). *Piropos and friendships: Gender and culture clash in a study abroad*. *Frontiers: The Interdisciplinary Journal of Study Abroad*, 1, 1–27.
- Tyler, A., & Boxer, D. (1996). Sexual harassment? Cross-cultural/cross-linguistic perspectives. *Discourse and Society*, 7(1), 107–33.
- Vandrick, S. (1994). Feminist pedagogy and ESL. *College ESL*, 4(2), 69–92.
- Vandrick, S. (1995). Teaching and practicing feminism in the university ESL class. *TESOL Journal*, 4(2), 4–6.
- Vandrick, S. (1997). The role of hidden identities in the postsecondary ESL classroom. *TESOL Quarterly*, 31(1), 153–7.
- Vandrick, S. (1999a). ESL and the colonial legacy: A teacher faces her "missionary kid" past. In G. Haroian-Guerin (Ed.), *The personal narrative: Writing ourselves as teachers and scholars* (pp. 63–74). Portland, Maine: Calendar Islands.
- Vandrick, S. (1999b). Who's afraid of critical feminist pedagogies? *TESOL Matters*, 9(1), 9.
- Watson, R. (1995). *The philosopher's demise: Learning French*. Columbia: University of Missouri Press.
- Weedon, C. (1987). *Feminist practice and poststructuralist theory*. Oxford: Basil Blackwell.
- Willett, J. (1995). Becoming first graders in an L2: An ethnographic study of L2 socialization. *TESOL Quarterly*, 29(3), 473–503.
- Yamashiro, A. (Ed.). (2000). Gender issues in language education [Special issue]. *Temple University Japan Working Papers in Applied Linguistics*, 17.